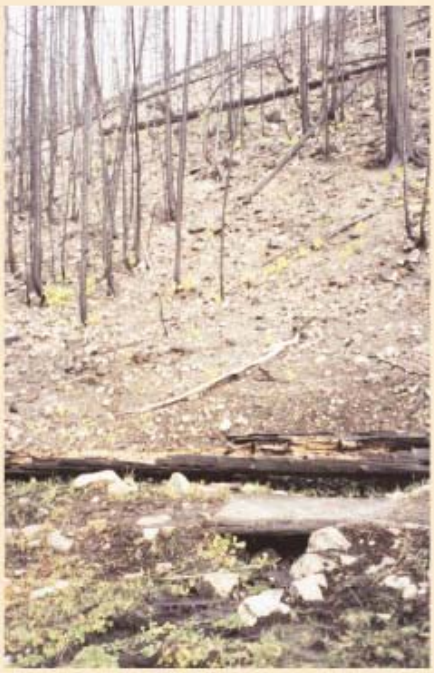
Aspen, Lodgepole Pine, and Fire

This photo, taken on October 10, 2002, shows the stump in front of this site with a few lupines and tiny aspen suckers.

Aspen and lodgepole pine are forest trees that rely on disturbances such as fire to perpetuate themselves. When a fire kills mature aspen, the roots are stimulated to send up new shoots called suckers. The black ash on the forest floor helps to increase soil temperature. This stimulates suckering, and it also provides a flush of nutrients to the young aspen for the first two or three years after the fire. Very hot fires can destroy aspen root systems, but fortunately, in this area, it appears that most aspen root systems survived the fire.

Lupine

Lodgepole pine trees usually have serotinous cones (cones with a hard resin coating) that require heat to open and release their seeds. Lodgepole pine will be the first conifers to become established after a fire. The East Fork Fire of 2002 burned so hot that most lodgepole pine cones and seeds in some areas were destroyed. Aspen may be the only tree species that regenerate quickly in some of these areas. Aspen provide shade for subalpine fir and spruce trees to become established over time.



This photo shows the bridge about 100 feet north of this site. It was one of the few bridges on the trail to survive the fire.